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ABSTRACT

The National Union Catalog (NUC) resulted from years of planning by librarians. Its history includes: (1) establishment of exchange agreements in 1909 with continuous increase in size resulting from donations and appropriations; (2) availability in book catalog form in 1946; (3) publication of titles of 1956 and later imprints, useful in acquisitions, interlibrary loans (ILL) and cataloging; (4) compilation of pre-1956 imprints beginning in 1976; and (5) publication of the NUC Register of Additional Locations (RAL) listing title locations not reported earlier. Although NUC production costs have risen and standards control problems exist, LC continues to extend the usefulness of NUC. The RAL will be more readily available in computer output microform to meet ILL and acquisitions needs of librarians. "Name Headings with References," containing new and revised name headings and references for LC catalogs, is an additional cataloging aid. As a result of Cooperative MARC and MARC Online Input System projects, LC is developing a format for machine-readable reports to the NUC with the possible development of online NUC. LC is committed to planning; however, limited time and resources necessitate the determination of priorities. Input from other libraries is imperative in making decisions to meet future needs. (Author/KP)

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The creation of the National Union Catalog was not accidental, but came about rather as a result of many years of thinking and planning by concerned librarians who either supported the idea of the card catalog or believed in the superiority of the book catalog. Over the years numerous articles were written and speeches made on the relative desirability of book and card catalogs and whether one should replace the other. While the debate was still going on, the Library of Congress made catalog-card exchange arrangements in 1909 with a group of large research libraries including Boston Public, Harvard and New York Public. With the contribution from these libraries a Union Catalog in card form came into existence.

The National Union Catalog grew to nearly two million cards by 1926. Its size increased markedly following a gift of a quarter of a million dollars from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in 1927, for the purpose of extending the catalog more rapidly. Funds from this donation provided the impetus for "Project B," under which more than six million cards were added in five years. For ten years after the expiration of the five-year period, expansion activity slackened with the depletion of this special funding. In 1943, increased appropriations made expansion again possible, and cards from regional catalogs (Cleveland and Philadelphia) and from additional federal libraries were added. In 1948 this card catalog officially became the National Union Catalog.

Although its merits were recognized by the library community and the scholarly world, it could not be made widely available to the public before the idea of book catalogs became acceptable to the libraries. Some librarians supporting book catalogs believed that in the end they would prove both more useful and less costly than the distribution of sets of cards. Those who were in favor of the card catalog, on the other hand, felt that the book format lacked the flexibility of the card catalog in terms of revision and currency once the information had been published.

In an effort to overcome the problem of inflexibility of book catalogs, the Library of Congress developed a general cumulative catalog technique for the republication of entries in successive issues of catalogs; this involves the preparation of each entry in a single unit capable of rearrangement for repeated printings. In this way, cards from issues covering current material could be easily interfiled and cumulated.

In 1941 a committee of the Association of Research Libraries was successful in sponsoring a project to reproduce a depository catalog of Library of Congress cards and issue it in book form. Completed in 1946, A Catalog of Books Represented by Library of Congress Printed Cards Issued to July 31, 1942, was published in 167 volumes and it was followed two years later by A Supplement: Cards Issued August 1, 1942--December 31, 1947 in 42 volumes. Other book catalogs, such as Library of Congress--Author Catalog, later renamed Library of Congress--Books: Authors, soon followed. The success of the publication of these book catalogs strengthened the conviction that there was a definite

advantage in having the card catalog and book catalog coexist. It also stimulated interest in the wealth of information in the National Union Catalog in card form. It was felt that the Library of Congress Catalog--Books: Authors should be developed to include union catalog cards, thus becoming a national catalog of the significant research books acquired by the American libraries and making available to the users the information contained in the National Union Catalog. Accordingly, twenty years ago, in 1956, The National Union Catalog: A Cumulative Author List (NUC) celebrated its birth, marking a turning point in the long history of efforts toward the bibliographical control of library resources.

The 1956 publication and succeeding issues which included titles and holdings of books of 1956 and of later imprints, reported by LC as well as other North American libraries, proved to be a very useful aid for regional and national planning of acquisitions programs and for a more equitable distribution of the interlibrary loan services, in addition to being a cataloging tool. The response from the library community toward this new publication was very enthusiastic, and as a result, the growth of the NUC has soared in these past twenty years. In 1956 the total number of reports made by all libraries was 103,000; now we receive more than three million cards a year. In 1956 there were only 750 reporting libraries; we now have almost 1,100. The expansion of the NUC coverage can also be measured by its successive quinquennial cumulations.

The 1953-57 cumulation appeared in 28 volumes, the 1958-62 quinquennial in 54, the 1963-67 cumulation in 72, and the 1968-72 quinquennial in 128--an increase of one hundred volumes over the first quinquennial!

As the records of the publications with 1956 and later imprints were brought under control it became apparent that there would be only partial bibliographical control unless the cards with pre-1956 imprints in the NUC file were also published. In October 1963 the ALA's Subcommittee on the National Union Catalog decided that it would invite bids for the publication of the National Union Catalog Pre-1956 Imprints. Mansell Information/Publishing Limited was selected as the publisher, under an agreement with the ALA whereby the publisher would finance all editorial costs for the editing to be done by LC staff. So in 1967 this massive undertaking of more than 600 volumes of bibliography, to be completed in approximately 12 years, was launched by the Library's newly created National Union Catalog Publication Project of the Processing Department. As of today 75 percent of the editorial work covering alphabets from A through REN have been completed. This work is undoubtedly the largest single bibliographic project in the 175-year history of the Library of Congress. By publishing the Pre-1956 Imprints and the ongoing National Union Catalog of current material, the Library of Congress is able to provide systematic and continuous coverage of materials acquired by LC and cooperating libraries.

To achieve the widest coverage of bibliographic control the Library of Congress in June 1956 published the first annual issue of The National Union Catalog--Register of Additional Locations (RAL). This publication, prepared by the Catalog Publication Division, supplements the NUC and provides additional locations of titles that have been reported since the original listing of those titles in the

NUC. However, the dramatic increase in the volume of reports received made us realize that we could no longer continue to produce this catalog by purely manual methods. In 1973, with the cooperation of LC's MARC Development Office, the Catalog Publication Division began to have all numerical listings in the RAL produced by automated techniques. For the 1968-72 quinquennial issue of the RAL an estimated 6 million records received in card form from cooperating libraries were converted to machine-readable form. The machine-readable file, consisting of the merged records input for the quinquennial issue and subsequent annual cumulations through 1975, contains approximately 1.75 million titles and 21 million location reports, with an average of 12.4 locations per title. We hope that by using automated methods for the production of this publication we will be able to keep the work current, thus providing the public with prompter service.

It is apparent from this much simplified brief history of the NUC that LC is constantly striving to improve its book catalogs to meet the needs of the library community. But LC have its limitations. The public is probably unaware of the fact that the Library labors under specific financial restrictions in all its book catalog publishing activities. Legislation enacted in 1902, and still effective, requires the Librarian of Congress to charge for all catalog publications "a price which will cover their cost and ten per centum added."

I should like here to explain briefly the functions and organization of the Catalog Publication Division of the Processing Department at the Library of Congress, the division in which the National Union Catalog is prepared. This division has the responsibility for

the planning, editing, and preparation of some 11 book catalogs, including the NUC. As an illustration of the high cost of preparing the NUC, I can point out that salaries alone run in the neighborhood of $1,300,000, not to mention the expenses involved in printing, binding, and distribution. All these expenditures must be recouped from the sales of the NUC. And as editorial and printing costs of book catalogs have risen, the prices of our catalogs have needed to keep pace, with the result that the NUC is now becoming very expensive. Fortunately we have more than 2,400 subscribers. The sharing of this cost makes it still bearable to the libraries. Even so, it is obvious that any improvements in the catalog must be considered carefully in terms of cost.

Another difficulty encountered by the Library of Congress in publishing the NUC is the fact that participation of other libraries is entirely on a voluntary basis. Although we do send out guidelines to reporting libraries, they are free to accept or reject our instructions for reporting. We cannot impose our standards on them. Many libraries are suffering from lack of staff, lack of time, lack of funds. Understandably, their reports are often inadequate. We can either insist on our standards and discard such reports or we can set our editors to work to make them suitable for inclusion in our publication. Discarding the reports would mean a loss of bibliographical information that might never be available to us again. Including the reports in the NUC would mean publishing some scanty or incomplete cataloging data, which might be helpful in acquisition or interlibrary loan services but would perhaps not be considered adequate to aid cataloging work.

With these limitations in mind, we faced the problem of extending the usefulness of the NUC. One specific question often arose. Is NUC used primarily for interlibrary loan or acquisition or for aiding cataloging work? Different groups of librarians gave us different answers, depending on whether they were catalogers or reference librarians. Since there was no real way to decide where to place the final emphasis, we had to respond to all three purposes. Our attempt to meet the first two needs led us to design and publish the NUC--Register of Additional Locations. Our desire to disseminate the RAL data to users more quickly and economically has resulted in our decision to make the RAL data available in cumulative microform editions. The MARC Development Office has completed the program to interface with a computer-output-microform (COM) device that will be used to produce the microform. It is expected that the microform edition will be available for sale later this year. It will include all the records in the machine file at that time.

In conjunction with the sale of this microform edition, with funds received from the Council on Library Resources for contractual support, LC will be conducting surveys to determine the utility of the RAL for interlibrary loan and the value of the microform edition, and to identify other machine-readable data bases from which location reports for the RAL could be obtained. The results of the survey will assist the Library in expanding the RAL file as rapidly as possible by capitalizing on existing machine-readable data bases. The greatly enlarged RAL file would then be the foundation on which an interlibrary loan network in this country could be based. By using a computer-output-microform (COM) device to produce this microform edition, we hope

to be able to distribute this publication on a much more timely basis.

Our next step was to see what could be done to strengthen our book catalog program for assisting the cataloging work in the nation. In 1974 the Catalog Publication Division launched a new publication, Library of Congress Name Headings with References, which is designed to contain newly established and newly revised name headings and references prepared for the catalogs of the Library of Congress. Name Headings with References can be viewed as a companion publication to the NUC, for it shows the full form of the newly established or revised headings with the references traced beneath the headings, while names requiring no references may be found in their established form in the NUC. We hope that by issuing the three publications we have taken a step in the right direction toward meeting the needs of the library community in all three work aspects--acquisitions, interlibrary loans, and cataloging.

As we review the much simplified account of the cycle of early book catalogs, then card catalogs, and again book catalogs, we realize that current technology in each case contributed to a great extent to the substitution of one form for the other. With the introduction of automation in recent years it is inevitable that the book catalogs are undergoing further changes.

In addition to the issuance of the microform editions of the RAL the Library of Congress has embarked on several projects that have direct or indirect effects on the NUC, such as COMARC (Cooperative MARC) Pilot Project and MARC Online Input System. COMARC is presently expanding LC's MARC data bases by including LC records converted to machine-readable form by six other libraries.

MARC Online Input System was implemented in March 1976. A limited number of records for books is added to the online system via the Format Recognition Program, and the records are corrected and verified online. At present the MARC Search Service is being used heavily within the Library of Congress. All MARC records for books, including all records cataloged in some 33 languages, beginning in 1976, are available by means of the online file. The online Register of Additional Locations will also be available through the Search Service by using a special function code and the LC card number.

A study is being made to develop a format for machine-readable reports to the National Union Catalog. Since it is feasible to define the characteristics of a machine-readable NUC report at a lower level than the full MARC format, the study will attempt to define the level of MARC encoding necessary and determine how this lower-level record could be upgraded to the full MARC encoding. In the meantime the Catalog Publication Division is experimenting with the conversion and input to MARC of outside-library NUC entries for which no LC main entry exists. The finished MARC records will be added to the MARC Search Service and used to print cards for the NUC. If both prove feasible, the Catalog Publication Division could begin inputting these records in 1977.

All these activities seem to lead to an eventual online NUC. But could online NUC replace the printed copy? Since we are acutely aware that full-scale retrospective conversion is highly improbable, we believe that the book catalog will continue to be used in conjunction with the automated file. Another consideration is that online access to a machine-data base is limited by the number of

terminals installed in the system. Furthermore, when browsing is necessary, or when the machine system is down, the book catalog would be an indispensable back-up device. The Library of Congress is considering the possibility of using a register/indexes book catalog as a back-up to the online operation. This would contain the full bibliographic record arranged by register numbers and would be published continuously without cumulation. The indexes by name, title, and subject would include abbreviated information and would be cumulated at regular intervals. If fuller information is needed the register number would point to the location of the full record in the Catalog. The target date for adopting this new format is 1980; however, with all the technical problems that await solution, the time when it can be achieved may be more distant than we can now foresee.

I should stress that current developments are only a part of the Library's continuing interest in achieving better bibliographic control and information services. For instance, we are thinking of providing systematic bibliographic coverage of non-Western publications. There can be no doubt that publications in Asian languages will become increasingly important to American interests in the future. The Library of Congress, as the national library, should therefore organize, bring up to date, and publish its union catalogs of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, South Asian and Near Eastern materials. However, although LC is committed to play an important role in the planning and operation of the information network, and has the desire to do so, we must face the fact that we are limited in money and time and the number of people available for this purpose. We must perforce set priorities.

We are now at a crossroads in determining the future of our book catalogs in general and the National Union Catalog in particular. Earlier I made the statement that the NUC was created in response to the needs of the nation's library community. The future of the NUC should also be determined by the response to changing times and to needs as they develop. There are many questions that need to be answered in order for us to set our priorities in proper perspective: Is the Register/Indexes format acceptable to the users? Should LC publish only a COM edition of the Register of Additional Locations, or are the paper edition annuals still needed? Should the RAL quinquennial be published only in COM, or is a hard copy quinquennial still needed?

The Library of Congress would of course make no autonomous decision on the appropriate destination of this important bibliography. Input from other libraries, we believe, is imperative in helping us make the right decision so that we can meet the needs of tomorrow as well as of today.